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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNSC](#) [KPKO](#) [MARR](#) [ER](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: GSE MAY WISH FOR UNMEE CONFIGURATION TO STAY THE SAME

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB Scott H. DeLisi, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) While in the past the GSE openly expressed indifference to UNMEE's headquarters in Asmara and to its operations and staffing, the GSE seems to be sending a different message, via back channels, to UNMEE now. According to UNMEE Political Officer, Bruno Mpondo-Epo, the GSE opposes any changes to UNMEE's present configuration. In meeting with Poloff on May 4, Mpondo-Epo shared that GSE officials told him they would not approve any changes to the UNMEE staffing and organization or the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The GSE appears to be requesting UNMEE's presence stay the same in order to provide a clear signal of commitment to border demarcation. Mpondo-Epo claimed that the GSE would see any reduction or relocation of UNMEE as a slight to GSE and a sign that the international community was not truly committed to demarcation. The downsizing or relocation of UNMEE would show the GSE that demarcation would not happen within the next 10 years.

¶2. (C) Mpondo-Epo went on, saying that within the past week, GSE officials told him that they would entertain discussions with Ethiopians; not the GOE, but the Ethiopian business community, about the use and operations of the port of Asab.

¶3. (C) Turning to Eritrea's role in Sudan, Mpondo-Epo expressed optimism that Eritrea's growing role there could contribute to the resolution of the border dispute in Ethiopia. By providing President Isaias and Eritrea with the opportunity to play, or be perceived as playing, a strategic role in Sudan, particularly regarding Darfur and in the East, the President and Eritrea will receive affirmation of their beliefs they are key and important regional players.

¶4. (C) Finally, Mpondo-Epo indicated that the GSE had voiced low expectations for the next EEBC meeting characterizing it as a formal discussion which will have to be endured even though no true outcomes are likely to be achieved.

15. (C) Comment: Mpondo-Epo's comments about the GSE's views on UNMEE's future may reflect the GSE's real attitudes more accurately than its previously professed indifference - an indifference that could easily be maintained when there was no risk of a significant change in the UNMEE's configuration. The GSE's desire to keep UNMEE's configuration in the status-quo is also a suggestion that the GSE may indeed believe that demarcation and resolution of the border dispute could be possible. We also find his comments about Asab to be a notably new tidbit which, if accurate, could signify a further evolution in Eritrean thinking. In the past Mpondo-Epo provided reliable and credible information regarding the GSE and their thinking. Although some of his analysis may be superficial his feel for the region and the players has been reasonably solid and offers a different perspective from a non-western source. End Comment.

DeLisi